

Man Bites Dog Not Always Enough to Get Press Coverage

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It used to be that man bites dog would 'stop the presses' and produce 'film at 11.' But with today's multi-media journalistic overload, even that sensational event might not be worthy of Page One treatment or the top story of the night. So how do you compete for coverage with a single sheet press release about your news worthy activity?

A short time ago, it wasn't difficult to create a single page release and get it published in the national wire services, or the Daily Bugle. News editors and reporters were only too eager to accept your release, publish, as is then move onto the barn burning events of the day.

The creation of the Internet three decades ago and the explosion of the World Wide Web have changed the media landscape forever. Traditional media venues, i.e. – print, radio and television, now compete with cable television news, the Internet and broadcast emails for immediacy in reporting and market share. So what does this have to do with a single page press release – everything because the days of the one size fits all release is as common as a T-Rex in Western Kansas!

Days ago the press release was all about the five Ws and an H. A public relations practitioner could simply crank out the who, what, when, where, why and how of an event and almost guarantee local media coverage without lifting a finger. Today, that same release must also include a 'what's in it for me?' local media qualifier.

Consider these elements that make an event newsworthy:

- Human Interest
- Affect upon individuals or the community
- Proximity to friends, neighbors and the community
- Timeliness
- Prominence involving local residents or famous folks coming to the area

As news departments deal with smaller staffs, 24-hour deadlines and shrinking newsholes, anything the PR practitioner can do to ease at least one of those burdens improves the chances of getting published in a timely manner. Like any good reporter, doing the proper homework will pay dividends in getting published.

Map out a strategy, and ask yourself:

1. Is the target audience local, regional, state or national? The higher the level, the competition for space or time increases.
2. What are the media outlets in this market? Think outside the box, and don't always rely on the traditional sources. Does a database of media contacts exist in the office?
3. How much lead-time is required to promote this event vs. the media deadlines? Usually, a larger event requires more lead time to promote but also runs the risk of running out of publicity steam unless a campaign is

created to keep the drums pounding frequently until the completion of the event.

Next, create the press release. Always stick to a single page with the basic information with you as the spokesperson, and all possible contact information. Make it very easy for the media to find you. As different media are considered for this release, think of ways or angles to customize the release that gets them interested in publicizing your event. It's part of the 'selling' process toward publication or broadcast.

Newspapers could use photographs, artwork or logos; radios would be interested in sound bites from key personnel; and TV wants to get a spokesperson or leader of the event on camera.

With a media strategy in place, and list of media outlets in hand, it's time to 'sell' the story. Use the media contact list and proactively recruit reporters to tell your story. Don't be offended when they ask 'so what?' when you request space or air time for the event – they're the gatekeepers to the public. Once you demonstrate the 'angle' for their company, the rest will fall into place thanks to a customized press release just for them.

Once the reporter accepts your release, don't assume your job is done. The job is done when the release shows up in print or on the air. Offer to assist with arranging interviews, locations for video footage, writing copy – any reasonable task that gets your event published by grabbing the reader's or viewer's attention.

As the event unfolds, keep track of the media coverage through clippings or videotaping coverage. Maintain contact with the reporters during the event and update them should events dictate more positive news coverage.

Your work isn't done after the story is published or broadcast. It's critical to maintain good working relationships with the reporter and their company for the future. A thank you note sent to the reporter, and their editor in some cases, displays appreciation and professionalism for a job well done.

Whether this was a first-time effort or the hundredth time, evaluate your efforts – noting the good things done and those requiring improvement for next time. Collaborate with others in the field for shared experiences and learning opportunities – it's a constantly changing landscape.

Let's hope your efforts never have to rely on the dogs!

Go to these on-line Press Release resources:

<http://www.canadaone.com/promote/pressrelease.html>

<http://www.tgci.com/magazine/96spring/press6.asp>

<http://www.wordstoweb.com/pressreleaseguideA.htm#What>